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C O N F I D E N T I A L CARACAS 001865

SIPDIS

NSC FOR C. BARTON
USCINCSO ALSO FOR POLAD

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [EPET](#) [MOPS](#) [VE](#)
SUBJECT: VENEZUELA-DUTCH ANTILLES: SOME IDEAS

REF: THE HAGUE 01556

Classified By: Amb. William R. Brownfield for reason 1.4 (d).

SUMMARY

1. (C) The Ambassador discussed Dutch concerns about Venezuelan intentions vis-a-vis the Netherlands Antilles with his Dutch counterpart June 20. The Ambassadors agreed to submit to their capital suggestions for how to respond to Gov assertiveness in the Antilles. The suggestions include a significant U.S. Navy ship (carrier) visit, high-profile USG counterdrug related visit, conclusion of a bilateral U.S.-Antilles agreement, fostering better Colombia-Antilles links, and exploring possible U.S. participation in Curacao's Isla refinery. The viability of these suggestions is to be determined, but each would help us sharpen our efforts to contain President Hugo Chavez and his revolution. End Summary.

2. (C) Ambassador met with Dutch Ambassador Dirk den Haas June 20 to follow up reftel conversations in The Hague about Dutch sensitivities in the Netherlands Antilles. He acknowledged that he has been warning his government over the past year of growing signals of Chavez assertiveness in the Dutch Antilles. Den Haas thought there was some domestic support in Curacao for the Chavez movement and vision. He warned that GONL room for engagement in the Antilles was circumscribed by island sensitivities and desire for operational independence, and that he did not want to take steps that would give Chavez a big target to criticize in terms of Dutch provocation.

3. (C) The Ambassadors agreed they would send five ideas back to capitals for possible consideration on how to respond to GOV assertiveness in the Antilles:

--Port call by U.S. Navy Carrier Battle Group. Den Haas thought this would send a very clear signal to Chavez, a man who does not catch subtle messages. Chavez accused us of sending a carrier four months ago during the USS Saipan visit; why not send a real one this time? Chavez would scream, but he would grasp the underlying deterrence message. The local governments would have to agree, but den Haas thought the economic value of a ship visit would produce an invitation. Any large U.S. Navy ship visit would send a message; a carrier would send it emphatically.

--High profile visit to Curacao/Aruba by senior USG official. After some discussion, den Haas agreed that a USG official responsible for counterdrug efforts would be the best fit. Possibilities: the Attorney General, ONDCP Director, DEA Administrator, or Commander USSouthernCommand. The very fact of the visit would advertise close cooperation between the US, Netherlands, and Antilles. Chavez would get the message.

--Conclude a USG agreement with Netherlands Antilles. Den Haas said it did not really matter what the agreement covered. Counterdrug cooperation, customs, trade, mutual legal assistance, bilateral investment: anything would do. The idea was to signal to Chavez that the relationship between the US and Antilles was close, and getting closer.

--Nudge Antilles and Colombia closer together. One sure way to get Chavez's goat was to encourage closer contact between Colombia and Aruba/Dutch Antilles. Den Haas did not know the extent of the current contact or cooperation with Colombia, but any increase would be sure to catch Chavez's attention.

--Transferring Curacao refinery lease to a U.S. company. The Isla Refinery, owned according to den Haas by the Curacao (as opposed to Netherlands Antilles) government, has a long term lease with Venezuelan national oil company PDVSA. The lease calls for 50-50 split in expenses. Den Haas does not believe it is a happy partnership. He believes Curacao would be delighted to abrogate and sign with a US partner. He believes the current deficit in worldwide refining capacity might offer possibilities.

COMMENT

14. (C) Among EU ambassadors resident in Caracas, den Haas is one of the toughest on Chavez, although that is not setting the bar very high. He promised to send these ideas to The Hague just as we would send them to Washington. We take no position from Caracas on what would work well in the Netherlands, Dutch Antilles, or Aruba. But each of these ideas would help us sharpen our efforts to contain Mr. Chavez and his revolution.
Brownfield

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